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BABE OF BETHLEHEM.



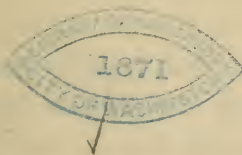
FRONTISPIECE.—See page 54.

CONVERSATIONS

ABOUT THE

BABE OF BETHLEHEM.

Written for the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, and
revised by the Committee of Publication.



BOSTON :

MASSACHUSETTS SABBATH SCHOOL SOCIETY,
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THE

BABE OF BETHLEHEM.

Anna. Mother, I wish I could go into Miss B.'s class at the Sabbath school.

Mother. Why, Anna, are you not satisfied with your own teacher?

Anna. I think she is a very good lady, but after I have said my lessons, she does not converse with me, and tell me all about it, and let me ask her questions, as Miss B. does her class.

Mother. But, Anna, how do you know what Miss B. says to her class?

Anna. Why, after I have got through with my lesson, then I sit still and listen; and Miss B. sits right behind me, so I can hear all she says.

Mother. I am glad, my dear, that you have a desire to gather all the knowledge you can; I hope, too, you will be profited by it; and you know I am always happy to afford you any assistance I can at home respecting your lessons, when you wish to receive it.

Anna. Well, dear mother, you know I have got through with the second chapter of Luke, and I can say every word; but there are a great many things in that chapter which I do not understand. Will you let me begin now to ask you some questions?

Mother. Certainly, my dear; so let us take the Bible and look up to God for a blessing on the instructions which

may be given from it, and I think we may pass a very pleasant and profitable evening.

Anna. Mother, do you always pray, when you are going to read the Bible?

Mother. My child, we ought always to ask God to enlighten our understandings, when we are about to read his word; for unless we have his Spirit to instruct us, and teach us its meaning, it will do us but little good.

Anna. Well, now I guess I know the reason why Miss B. always sits a little while with her eyes shut, just as if she was praying in her mind, before she begins to hear her class recite their lessons; and so when she talks, I suppose that God helps her, because she has asked his blessing. But my teacher does not have time to do so, for she always comes in late, and then she

has to hurry us, that we may get through.

Mother. Well, Anna, I will tell you what you can do. While you are waiting for your teacher to come, you can shut your eyes and look up to God and ask him to give his Spirit to her, that she may be prepared to meet her class ; and to grant it also to you, and your class, that you may improve by all the instruction which may be given.

Anna. So I can, dear mother, and I will begin next Sabbath.

Mother. Well, what is your first question ?



THE TAXING.



Anna. Who was Cæsar Augustus?

Mother. He was the Roman emperor, my dear.

Anna. Well, why did he wish to have all the world taxed?

Mother. Augustus was then taking a census of the people.

Anna. But I don't see why they should go away from the place where they lived, every one into his own city.

Mother. You will find your answer in the next verse, Anna, where it says

that "Joseph went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, *because* he was of the house and lineage of David." When a census was taken among the Jews, it was made by tribes, clans, and families, but as they had been so scattered and separated, it seemed highly necessary now, that they should betake themselves each one to the place which had formerly fallen to the lot of his clan, or family, all which could be known from the genealogical tables, which were kept by the Jews with remarkable exactness.

Anna. What is a genealogical table, mother?

Mother. It is a list of ancestors; an account or history of the rise, progress, and present state of any person's family, showing the regular descent.

Anna. Were the Jews obliged to keep such tables?

Mother. The providence of God, who overrules all events, may be very clearly seen in this thing. It had been foretold from what tribe and family the Messiah should spring, and though it might appear like pride in the Jews, to keep with so much exactness the line of their ancestry, yet this alone was the very thing which was necessary, to prove that the Babe of Bethlehem who was about to appear was He of whom the prophets wrote so many hundred years before.

Anna. Then I suppose that Joseph went to Bethlehem to be taxed because his family used to live there.

Mother. Joseph and Mary, though so very poor, belonged to the line of David; of course it was necessary to repair to the city of David in order to

be enrolled, or have their names written in their order among that line.

Anna. Was David, Joseph's father?

Mother. No, Anna; he was not the father of Joseph, for David lived a great many hundred years before Joseph was born; but as I said before, Joseph belonged to the same line or family. You have frequently heard your father speak of the first settlers of this country, who came from England, and settled at Plymouth. They were called our forefathers; afterwards they died and left children; then those children died, and left other children, and so on, until we were born. If you will read the first chapter of Matthew, you will see how it was as it regards the ancestry of Joseph.

Anna. The first chapter of Matthew! mother? Why, that is only a

chapter of hard names. I don't see as I could learn any thing from that.

Mother. It is a very important chapter, my dear, and if you will look at the sixth verse, you will find that David's name is mentioned as then born, and as you read on, you will find that there were many generations between David and Joseph, but that they were all connected, or related; and you can see also how it was that Joseph belonged to the line or house of David.

Anna. Well, mother, I never thought before that there was any thing in those hard names, which could be useful to any body.

Mother. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*; and whatever he has caused to be written, is of vast importance. You will find nothing superfluous,—nothing unnecessary in that blessed book.

JOSEPH AND MARY AT BETHLEHEM,
AND JESUS'S BIRTH.

Anna. How far did Joseph and Mary have to go when they went to be taxed?

Mother. Nazareth was about sixty or seventy miles from Bethlehem. Nazareth was in Galilee; and the city of David, or Bethlehem, was in Judea.

Anna. I should have thought that if Joseph and Mary had gone to the town which belonged to their ancestors, they could have found somebody who knew them, and who would invite them to stay with them in a house; but it says in this chapter, that when Jesus was born, they laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in

the inn. I am sure they must have been very unkind people, and very different from what folks now are ; for you remember when father went to B—, after dear grandpa died, he told us how earnest all the neighbors were to have him stay with them. One would want him,—another would beg him to stay with them, and he said he could hardly get away.

Mother. All this I remember ; but suppose, Anna, your father should have a call to go to Plymouth, a place which he has never seen, do you suppose that he would meet with the same reception ?

Anna. Why, if there was no one there who knew him, I suppose he would not. But then he could go to a hotel.

Mother. Let me ask you another question. Supposing that about the

time he arrived at Plymouth, a great many hundred strangers who had more money than your father, should arrive also, and occupy all the room which could be possibly found at any hotel or public house; what could he do then?

Anna. Why, then he would have to stay where he could.

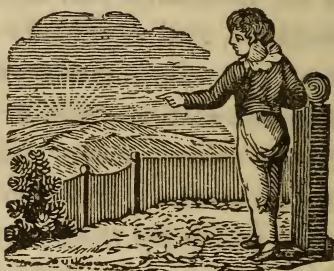
Mother. Well, my dear, this was just the case with Joseph and Mary. They were strangers to all who lived in that place; and as very many others had also flocked to Bethlehem in order to be taxed, it is very likely that every house and inn were filled by those who could best afford to pay for their accommodation; so that the poorer class as they arrived, would be obliged to put up with any place which would afford them a shelter.

Anna. Do you think the manger,

where they laid the infant Jesus, was any thing like the one which I used to see in the stable at grandpa's?

Mother. I think not, Anna. In the East there are many natural and artificial caves which are used for many different purposes; some of them have been used for sepulchres, and some for a retreat for herdsmen and their cattle in bad weather, and especially in winter nights, and often travelers, when other accommodations could not be found, would occupy these caves as a shelter for themselves, and also convert them into a stable for their cattle. In some of those caverns, a rude manger, or excavation hollowed out of the sides is seen, which might answer very well for the purpose of feeding their cattle; though by some it is supposed, that these places were appropriated by the ancient inhabitants to bury their dead.

There are many of these caves in Judea, and it is very probable that it was in such a one that Joseph and Mary found a lodging, and that in one of these excavations round the sides Jesus was laid.



THE SHEPHERDS.



Anna. Well, now I want to ask you about the shepherds. I don't see why they staid all night in the field. Do our shepherds have to keep watch all night?

Mother. In our country, Anna, few or none make it their exclusive business to tend cattle, as they do in the East. Among the Jews it was a custom to send out their sheep to the deserts about the time of the Passover in the

spring, and bring them home again in the fall, so that they would be ranging the country for feed during the whole summer; and with such a custom, it was highly necessary that there should be some, appointed wholly for the purpose of watching over them, to prevent them from being lost or stolen, or destroyed by wild beasts.

Anna. Did they have to stay out every night, mother?

Mother. O no. I presume that many would go together, and each one would take his turn to watch, while the others slept.

Anna. Well, I don't wonder that they felt afraid, when the angel came. How do you suppose they knew it was an angel? had they ever seen one?

Mother. We do not learn from the Bible that they ever had; but when they beheld such a personage before

them, clothed in robes of light, which no doubt was very glorious, they could not but think that it was some heavenly messenger.

Anna. Were those shepherds Christians?

Mother. They were certainly highly favored of God, to have the knowledge of a Saviour's birth first communicated to them; and probably they were among the number of those who believed what the Prophets had written respecting his coming, and were expecting him, and were also ready to acknowledge him.



WHO THE PROPHETS WERE.

Anna. I want you to tell me about the Prophets. How could they know about Christ, and when he would be born?

Mother. A prophet, Anna, is one who foretells what is to be, or what will come to pass; and before the Saviour was born, there were many such among the Jews, to whom God revealed all that he wished to make known, and caused them to write it down so that all the Jews could have a full opportunity of knowing what would be done to their nation. Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Hosea, Joel, Malachi, and many others were prophets, and they all wrote concerning the kingdom of Christ. Micah, one of the prophets,

tells the very name of the place where Jesus should be born, though he lived seven hundred years before the event took place.

Anna. O do show me the place, for I can hardly believe it.

Mother. Here it is, Anna, I will read it. Micah 5: 2. “But thou *Bethlehem Ephratah*, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Anna. You said that all the Jews could read and understand what the prophets wrote. Did the prophets go and ask the people to read what God had told them to write?

Mother. Tradition informs us that the writings of the prophets were at

first, after having been delivered, affixed to the door of the temple, where they continued some time, so that every one who went to the temple to worship could have an opportunity of reading them, and afterwards they were taken down and entered in their registers; but it is not certain that this was the case. However, the prophetic writings were always read in the temple, just as the Bible is read in our churches; and every Jew had an opportunity of hearing.



WHY THE ANGELS BROUGHT GOOD
TIDINGS.

Anna. Why did the angels say they brought good tidings? did none but the angels know that the Babe was Jesus Christ?

Mother. Perhaps none knew that he was born; Mary was a stranger in Bethlehem, and the Jews, who were looking for a temporal Saviour, would rather expect that his birth-place would be in a palace or in some costly abode; of course, they would feel no interest in an infant, born of such lowly parents, and cradled in a manger, had they heard of the event.

Anna. Did the Jews desire the Saviour to come, mother?

Mother. The Jews were under

subjection to the Romans, and as the prophets had declared that the Messiah should be born about this time, and would be a Prince and a Saviour, they had formed the expectation that he was to come in order to deliver them from the bondage of the Romans, and make them again a free nation, and be their ruler, or king. Such a Saviour they desired.



HOW THE JEWS RECEIVED THE
SAVIOUR.

Anna. Then I suppose they were very glad when the shepherds told them what the angels said.

Mother. The greater part of them, Anna, would not believe any thing about it. They were too proud to believe that their long-expected Messiah should be the child of parents so obscure as Joseph and Mary; so they rejected him altogether.

Anna. I should have thought, mother, that they would have believed, when the shepherds told them how the angels sung and rejoiced.

Mother. The proud heart of man often rejects the testimony of Heaven.

Anna. Well, I love to hear about those shepherds, because they believed;

and I don't wonder they wanted to go directly to Bethlehem. They did not doubt that they should find Jesus there, as the angels told them,—did they, mother?

Mother. We read that they came with haste; they left their flocks and all their cares behind, intent only on one thing,—to find their Saviour; and this, dear Anna, is the duty of every one who has heard any thing about him; they ought to make it their first and highest object to seek him, and then, when they have found a Saviour, and acknowledged him, they will do as the shepherds did,—return to their business with hearts prepared to glorify God.

Anna. Well, it does seem very strange to me, that every body did not believe, when the angels told the shepherds just how and where they

should find him ; and when they found it to be just as the angels said, and told the people all about it—that they would not believe that he was the Saviour ; were not the Jews more wicked than we are, mother ? for I am sure I believe all about it.

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BELIEVING IN JESUS.

Mother. It is one thing, dear Anna, to believe that the Saviour was born, but quite another thing to receive him as *our Saviour*, to deliver us from sin ; and every one who does not give up his whole heart to him, or refuses to obey his commands, rejects him as a Saviour, as much as the Jews rejected him as their Deliverer.

Anna. The Bible says, that all they who heard these things wondered, but Mary kept them and pondered them in her heart.

Mother. Yes, the people heard the story of a Saviour's birth, and wondered at all the things which had been related, but we do not read that they believed, or owned him as their Saviour ; and

this is just what too many people do now. Many go to the house of God every Sabbath, and listen to his ministers as they hold forth a Saviour; they are invited and entreated every one to believe on him, and own him, that their sins may be pardoned,—and what is the effect? They hear, and wonder; but they go their way, one to his farm and another to his merchandize,—and so they perish.

Anna. Well, if I was grown to be a woman, I am sure that I should not do so.

Mother. Anna, do you remember when Mr. B. preached a sermon in our church, addressed wholly to Sabbath school children, from this text, “Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not?”



Anna. O yes, mother. And I remember how many stories he told of good children, who loved the Saviour, and became pious while they were attending the Sabbath school, and how happy some of them were when they died.

Mother. Well; what else did he say?

Anna. Why, he said if all the children in our school would go to Jesus then, and give their hearts to him, and begin that day to love and obey him, that they too would be happy in life, and happy when they died; and then,

mother, you know he told us all about what Jesus had done, and how he died on the cross for children, and for every body. O, I wish Mr. B. would come and preach again, for I admire to hear him.

Mother. Do you not think, Anna, that some of the Jews admired to sit and hear the shepherds tell their story, about the infant Saviour?

Anna. O yes, I suppose they did; but what good would that do? You know they did not believe.

Mother. Did you believe Mr. B. when he told how much Jesus had done and suffered, that little children might be saved?

Anna. Certainly I did, dear mother, why, how could I help believing? Mr. B. would not tell an untruth.

Mother. Well, did you begin that day to love and serve the Saviour,

to give up your heart to him, to seek him by prayer; in short, are you a Christian?

Anna. Why, I am only a little girl, mother; you know that I am not quite ten years old.

Mother. Are you too young to die, my dear Anna?



Anna. No, I am not too young to die, because you know that Mr. B. told about those little girls, and a little boy, who died before they were as old as I now am.

Mother. I am glad that you remember that; and those dear children

knew what it was, to believe in a Saviour. They had given their hearts to him before they were as old as you are; they had tasted of his dying love, and when laid on a bed of death, they enjoyed his presence and the smiles of his countenance, and went down to the grave, fully assured that their happy spirits would live for ever with him in heaven. All this, my dear daughter remembers and believes, and wonders at it, yet excuses herself from loving Christ because she is a little girl not quite ten years of age! Do you not begin to feel that there may be something in your heart, which may be very like what the Jews had in theirs, and which renders you guilty before God?

Anna. What is it, mother?

Mother. It is your heart itself, that heart which hates holiness, and loves

sin. Every heart which is not renewed by the Holy Spirit, continually rejects God, rejects the Saviour, chooses to indulge its own inclinations, and will not bow to the commands of Christ. It was this, which prevented the Jews from acknowledging the Messiah ; it is this which prevents sinners from coming to him now, both old and young ; all are without excuse ; for all are sinners, and need a Saviour ; and as soon as that Saviour is made known to little children, it is their duty to love and serve him with their whole heart ; and I am sure that Sabbath school children can never say, that they, of all others, have not been early taught the way which leads to heaven ; and if they die with an unholy heart, and go and stand before the judgment-seat, they can have no excuse to offer for rejecting the blessed Saviour.

Anna. Will children have to stand at the judgment-seat, mother? I thought that only very wicked people would have to go there.

Mother. Here, Anna, take the Bible and read these verses in Rev. 20: 11—15.



[*Anna reads.*] “ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away ; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before

God ; and the books were opened ; and another book was opened, which is the book of life : and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it ; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them ; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire."

Mother. This, my child, is a true representation of what will surely take place at the end of the world. And in this awful solemnity none of us will be merely spectators. The small, as well as the great, will be judged out of those books which will then be opened ; and if your name shall not be found written

in the book of life, you with others, must share the doom of those who amid multiplied privileges have died rejecting the Saviour.

Anna. You make me tremble, dear mother, for I did not think of these things before.

Mother. I really hope you will think of them, Anna, and repent of your sins; then God will give you his Holy Spirit to teach you his will, to sanctify and cleanse your heart, and to direct you in that upward path which leads the soul to heaven. And now let us once more return to your lesson.



THE PRESENTATION.

Anna. How far was Bethlehem from Jerusalem?

Mother. The distance was not great; about six miles, I think.

Anna. What does it mean by presenting him to the Lord? Was not the infant Saviour, the Lord? I do not understand this.

Mother. I must again refer you to the custom of the Jews. Their law obliged them, when the first-born child was a son, to bring him to the temple at the end of forty days, and present him to the Lord. The parents were also required to bring a lamb for a burnt-offering, and a dove for a sin-offering; or if they were poor, they were permitted to bring two doves instead of the lamb. Now it was to

comply with this law that Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple; and as they were poor, they brought two doves. As Jesus came into the world to *fulfil all righteousness*, it was proper that this law should be fulfilled. Though he was Christ the Lord, yet the Bible tells us, that *he was made flesh, and dwelt among men*.



SIMEON.

Anna. Now please to tell me about Simeon. What does it mean by his waiting for the consolation of Israel?

Mother. It means that he was one of those Jews who believed all that the prophets had written about Christ. He had felt that the time had come for Christ to appear; for no doubt he had searched out all which had been written respecting him by the prophets, and he had waited and prayed that he might be permitted to live until he should behold him; so he was ready to acknowledge him, however humble his birth might be.

Anna. The Bible says that the Holy Ghost was upon him. What is meant by this, mother?

Mother. The Holy Ghost, my child, means the Holy Spirit; or it may sometimes mean the inward teaching of God in our hearts. Perhaps, in the case of Simeon, it was like the prophetic spirit which the prophets had. God had revealed to him that he should see the Saviour before he died; and as he went into the temple just at the time when Joseph and Mary had brought in the infant Saviour, he knew and felt that the babe was the promised Messiah; so, when he took him in his arms, he broke out into that holy strain of praise, which was a public testimony of his belief that the Consolation of Israel—the Deliverer—the Prince of Peace—had already come, to bless the world.

Anna. What did he mean by saying, “Now lettest thou thy servant

depart in peace, according to thy word ? ”

Mother. As the good old man was



now sure that the Saviour had come, and that his people had received in him the greatest blessing which could be bestowed upon a nation, he was *fully satisfied* ; he was ready then to live or die. The angels had sung, “ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good-will to men ; ” and now Simeon felt it in his own soul. With him, all was peace within. Just so did those dear children feel, of

whom Mr. B—— spake, in his sermon; they had found the Saviour, and then they were ready to stay on earth and serve him, or go to the upper temple, where they should enjoy his presence for ever.

Anna. When he said, “ Mine eyes have seen thy salvation,” did he mean that he had seen Jesus ?

Mother. Yes. Christ is the salvation of all who will believe on him.

Anna. Who were the Gentiles, mother ?

Mother. All who were not Jews, my child, as you will see from the declaration of Simeon, that *Christ should be “ a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of the people of Israel.”* It was indeed an honor to that nation, to have Christ first make his appearance among them in the flesh, and to be called after their name.

But the greater part of them refused to believe in him, and then the knowledge of him and his salvation was sent by his ministers or apostles to the Gentiles. These apostles went to them, and preached about the Saviour, just as our missionaries go among the

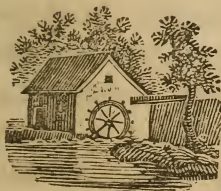


heathen, and endeavor to enlighten their minds, and turn them from the worship of idols, to serve the true God.

Anna. How did Simeon know any thing about the Gentiles? Had the prophets written any thing about them?

Mother. O, yes. Much is said by the prophets of the great salvation which should come to the Gentiles, by Jesus Christ.

Anna. Please, dear mother, to read to me something which the prophet said about it.



CHRIST A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES.

Mother. As the evening is about spent, Anna, I shall not be able to turn to more than one passage at present; but at some future time we will endeavor to collect all the passages which refer to Christ, and talk over the matter further. The passage to which Simeon refers is in Isaiah 49: 6. "*And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*"

Anna. What does it mean by saying that Christ should be set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel?

Mother. The Jews, dear Anna, were a self-righteous people; they trusted very much to their outward forms and ceremonies, and, with few exceptions, felt but little their need of a Saviour to cleanse them from sin. The doctrines of Christ would of course be contrary to all their views and feelings. Their hearts would hate these doctrines, and their opposition would prove their ruin. If they rejected Christ (and as a nation they did reject him), though he came to be their Saviour, he would, as the Bible expresses it, be “a stone of stumbling;” they would perish, and their punishment would be much more awful than if a Saviour had never been known to them. But there would be some, even among the Jews, who would believe in him; there were some who would receive his doctrines into their hearts,

and their proud spirits would be humbled,—they would become like little children,—they would love to sit at the feet of their Saviour, who was meek and lowly, and learn of him ; and so when they were broken off from all confidence in themselves, then Christ would exalt them,—he would honor them, and acknowledge them as his friends.



ANNA THE PROPHETESS.

Anna. Was Anna a prophetess, like Simeon and Isaiah?

Mother. She is called a prophetess; but perhaps it only means that she was a very pious woman, who devoted much of her time to prayer, and searching the Scriptures, and to the service of the temple.

Anna. Do you think that she staid all the time, both day and night, in the temple?

Mother. I think not, my dear. It is thought that she had lodgings very near the temple, and, as she was a very devout woman, she spent much of her time in that place (as there was access to it at all seasons), praying that the promises respecting the Saviour might be speedily fulfilled; and as the

worship of God in the temple was continued at stated intervals through the night, as well as the day, and anthems of praise were sung to his name, it is not unlikely that a woman so devoted as Anna was, would often delight to be present, and unite in that delightful service.

Anna. Who were the people to whom she spoke about the Saviour? were they Jews?

Mother. Yes; there were some, as I before observed, who were anxiously expecting the Messiah, and who felt that the time had come when he should appear. Of course, so good a woman as Anna would be well acquainted with such; and when she had seen the babe, as he was presented in the temple, and knew (perhaps by revelation) that it was indeed the infant Jesus, you can conceive with what delight and rapture

she would spread abroad the tidings. I almost seem to see this holy woman, forgetting all the infirmities of age, and, with a countenance beaming with gratitude and love, seeking out her associates, who had, with her, long waited and looked for the Redeemer; and telling them that he had now come, and that she had seen him in the temple.



JOSEPH'S AND MARY'S RETURN.

Anna. How long did Joseph and Mary stay in Bethlehem, before they went back to their home, mother?

Mother. I do not know, Anna, that it can be ascertained correctly, how long they staid in Bethlehem; but, from Matthew's account of some transactions respecting the visit of the wise men, and the result of that visit, it is evident that considerable time elapsed before they returned to Nazareth. (*See Frontispiece.*)

Anna. Why did Matthew know more about it than Luke did? There is nothing about the wise men in this chapter; but now I recollect that I saw a picture of Joseph and Mary, with the babe, and some men kneeling down and offering gifts. O, yes, and I can

remember now about reading in the Bible how they offered gifts, "gold, frankincense and myrrh;" but I don't see why Luke did not tell about it in this chapter. Do you think that he forgot it, mother?

Mother. O, no, Anna; but as they wrote their history at different periods, it could not be expected that they both would always mention the same circumstances, or write in the same style. They wrote as they were inspired, and one would name one circumstance, another a different one; so that, between them all, we have been able to collect all the facts.

Anna. I don't hardly understand you, mother.

Mother. Well, supposing that I was to call on you and your cousin Harriet, to give me an account of the proceedings of the Sabbath school

during the past year—all that your teacher had said to you, and all that you could remember of every transaction—you might both tell me the truth, and yet your accounts might differ very greatly. Harriet might be very brief, and omit many things of deep interest, which had been said; and you might be much more particular, and yet omit the mention of some circumstances on which she had dwelt with great particularity. Just so it was with Matthew and Luke. Luke says nothing about the wise men, and Matthew is silent respecting the shepherds, in whom you feel so deep an interest.

Anna. Thank you, dear mother. I think I understand you now; but don't you think that you could have time this evening just to tell me what Matthew wrote about the Saviour? for I do want to hear a little more about it.

MATTHEW'S AND LUKE'S HISTORY
UNITED.

Mother. As you seem to have a hearing ear, I do not know that I ought to disappoint you; and if you will attend, I will endeavor to bring the history of Matthew into a connection with that of Luke, and make it one history, with the addition of other facts.

Anna. May I ask you questions about it, mother, as you tell me; or must I be silent and hear you?

Mother. If there is any thing which you do not fully understand, I certainly ought to be willing that you should ask to be informed; for I think it very important that children should be made to comprehend all about what they read in the Bible, or it certainly will be of but little use to read it.

Anna. Well, mother, please now begin to tell me what Matthew says.

Mother. It is supposed that Joseph and Mary resided nearly two years in Bethlehem, after the birth of the infant Saviour ; but as they were poor, they appear to have been but little noticed. The only account we have of any testimony being given that he was the Messiah, was that of the angel to the shepherds, and their report, which did not seem to be much believed, and that of Simeon and Anna in the temple. When they had been about two years in Bethlehem, the wise men from the East arrived at Jerusalem, and made inquiry where he was, who was born king of the Jews.



THE WISE MEN.

Anna. Why were they called “wise men,” mother? did it mean that they knew more than other people?

Mother. I presume, Anna, that they were men of great repute in their own country, and had devoted their life to study, and, perhaps, were famous for their knowledge in astronomy; and as they, while still in Arabia, discovered an extraordinary star, such as they had never seen before, they took it to be an indication of some extraordinary person born in Judea, over which land this star was seen to hover, in the nature of a comet or meteor, in the lower regions of the air.

Anna. Did these men know any thing about Jesus?

Mother. No, they were Gentiles, or

heathen ; but there was at that time, in the East, a general expectation that some great personage was about to appear, and that Judea was the land from which he was to spring ; and when this uncommon star, which seemed to hover over that land, appeared, their minds were directed by the secret power of God to follow its guidance. They were led by it to Jerusalem, and when they arrived, they made their inquiry.

Anna. Did they mean to acknowledge him, as Simeon and Anna did ?

Mother. Simeon and Anna acknowledged the infant Saviour, as him who should deliver them from their sins ; but probably the wise men designed only to pay a homage or worship, which is generally given to kings and great men ; still it may be hoped that when they had found him in his low

condition, God, who has the hearts of all men in his hands, revealed to them the nature of the mission on which Jesus came into the world, and that they received him as their Saviour also.

6



HEROD TROUBLED.

Anna. What made Herod so troubled, when he heard the inquiry of the wise men, mother?

Mother. Herod was a proud and cruel man; and when he found that it was suspected that a child was already born, who it was thought would be king of the Jews, he began to fear that he might one day be deprived of his kingdom, and have to give way to this new king, whose birth seemed to be made known in so wonderful a manner.

Anna. Well, it seems very strange to me that Herod should not have known something about the birth of that infant. I should have thought that the Jews, and the high priest, and the scribes, would have remembered what Simeon said about him, when he

was carried to the temple, and would have known just who he was, and would have told Herod.

Mother. I have observed to you before, Anna, that though the Jews were expecting the Messiah, yet they expected him as a temporal deliverer to their nation, and that when he came he would come in a very different manner from that of the babe of Bethlehem. That an infant, born of such obscure parents, and in such humble circumstances, should be their king, and the deliverer of their nation, they would not believe. So they entirely rejected him, and gave no heed at all to any thing which Simeon, or even the angels, had declared.

Anna. But, my dear mother, when the scribes had read what the prophet had written about him, and had acknowledged to Herod that it was

written that he should be born in Bethlehem, how could they help believing?

Mother. You seem determined to gain your point, Anna; but I can only continue to say to you that *they did not—they would not*—believe, because their hearts were madly intent on having a king to deliver them from temporal bondage; and because they would not believe, God gave them up to unbelief and ruin.

Anna. Well, then, was not Herod better than the Jews? for he sent the wise men to find out the babe, that he also might worship him. I guess that he began to be willing that he should be the king.

Mother. No, he had a very different motive, when he commissioned them to go and search for him. You recollect that he inquired *privately* of them what time the star appeared; and

when they had told him, he concluded that the babe whom they had come to seek could not yet be two years of age, if that star appeared about the time of its birth ; and with this knowledge he then determined to destroy all the male children who were near that age, in and about Bethlehem, hoping that among the number the infant Jesus might also fall a victim, and then he thought that his throne would be secure. But he concealed his wickedness under a show of devotion, and so sent the wise men away on their search. How much they may have regarded Herod, at the time, we cannot tell ; but they went, and then the star, which had been so long their guide, still went before them, until, coming to Bethlehem, it seemed to be stationary over the dwelling where the young child was. They then entered the house,

and found the babe, with Mary its mother; and then they fell down and worshiped, after the custom of the East, and presented their gifts, which were very valuable.

Anna. Did Mary and Joseph wish to receive these valuable presents from such strangers?

Mother. We cannot tell, Anna, particularly about that. But as, through the cruelty of Herod, they were soon obliged to flee into Egypt in a very hasty manner, in order to save the life of the young child, and as they were poor, no doubt these presents may have been very convenient to them; and possibly they were given just in time to help them on their long journey. In this view, Joseph and Mary, acknowledging the hand of God in all things, would doubtless receive these presents as coming directly from him.

Anna. After the wise men had seen Jesus, did they go back and tell Herod that they had found him?

Mother. No; God appeared to them in a dream, and bade them return to their own country by another direction; and they obeyed. And here, Anna, is a proof that God reads the thoughts and knows the hearts of all men; for, though the wicked Herod imagined that he had kept his design of cruelty concealed from every one, yet the eye of God searched it out, and defeated his wicked design.—After God had commanded the wise men to return home, he also appeared in the same way to Joseph, and bade him take his family and flee into Egypt, and remain there till he should give him notice to return home, saying that Herod would seek to destroy the young child.

Anna. Did Joseph obey God?

Mother. Certainly; he immediately did as God commanded. He sat out that very night, and went into Egypt, and there remained until Herod was dead.

Anna. How long did they stay in Egypt, before Herod died?

Mother. It is uncertain; but it was not a long season.

Anna. How did Herod feel, upon being so disregarded by the wise men?

Mother. He was in a great rage, my dear; and being determined not to be defeated, he sent out his soldiers to Bethlehem, and made them murder all the male children in and around the place.

Anna. O, how cruel! Why, I should have thought, mother, that if God had known what he intended to do, he would in some way have hin-

dered him. Do you think that God knew what he did?

Mother. Certainly! There is no act which is performed, which is not known to God; but he often permits evil for some wise purpose, which we cannot always comprehend.

Anna. Do you mean that God lets people be wicked, and do such cruel things as Herod did, and not punish them?

Mother. Sin always brings its own punishment; and I should think that a heart so full of cruelty and malice as Herod possessed, would be a sufficient punishment in itself; but history informs us that God manifested his displeasure of Herod's conduct by bringing on him very fearful diseases, such as could not be cured; and that long before he died, his life was a burden to himself and all around him.

Anna. Why, what was the matter with him?

Mother. Josephus, a Jewish writer, informs us that he was seized with a disease which burned him inwardly, with great torture, attended with the colic, the gout and dropsy; and that he was so offensive that none could go near him to attend him; while, at the same time, he was so passionate that he was a torment to himself, and a terror to all who saw him: and yet he was so cruel, that just before he died he commanded his own son to be put to death. Knowing that at his own decease no one would mourn for him, he commanded that a large number of the nobility should be put in prison, to remain there until he died, and then be slain, so that there should be mourning and sorrow at the time of his death, though they would not

mourn for him. And with such feelings as these, dear Anna, he died; thus his naked spirit went to the tribunal of a holy God, there to be judged for all the deeds done in the body.

Anna. O, how awful—how awful!

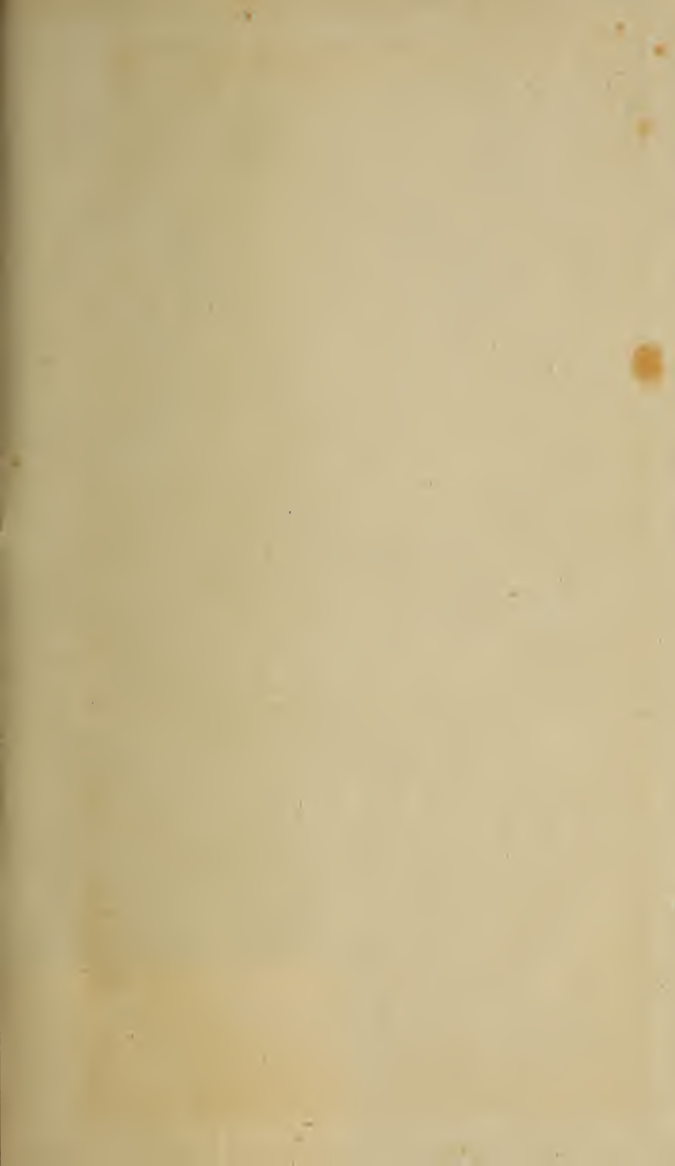
Mother. Here we are brought back, to unite the history of Matthew with that of Luke; for when this wicked king was dead, God appeared again to Joseph, and informed him of it, and bade him leave Egypt, and go into the land of Israel. So Joseph and Mary, with the infant Saviour, arose and went back to Nazareth, and there dwelt. Thus ends the history of the *Babe of Bethlehem*. The remainder of the chapter will give us an opportunity of considering him in another point of view; but as it is growing late, if my little daughter wishes it, we will take another evening, and talk of him as

the obedient child, and about his visit to Jerusalem.

Anna. Well, I shall long to have another evening come; for I did not know before that such a good history could be made out of one chapter in the Bible.

Mother. The Bible is a precious book, my dear, and it has one beauty which no other book possesses—it is *always new*; and the more we study it, the deeper is the interest which we shall always feel in it; and it is my prayer, dear Anna, that you may so study it, that it may prove a light to your feet, and a lamp to your path; guiding you to the Babe of Bethlehem, and leading you to accept of him as your Saviour and Redeemer.





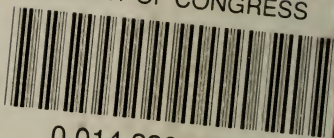
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